

5. Notes on *Conurus hilaris* and other Parrots of the Argentine Republic. By Dr. H. BURMEISTER, F.M.Z.S.

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During my residence at Tucuman, in the years 1859-60, I saw several flights of six or eight of a long-tailed parrot, of which I was not able to obtain a specimen, although the birds came every week during the maturing-time of the Indian corn to the garden of the house in which I lived, and did much damage to the seeds of the plants cultivated there. This bird, while it had the same habit of plundering the gardens as the other Parrots inhabiting this country (for example *Conurus patagonus* and *C. murinus*), was also, like its fellows, very cautious, some of them keeping watch on the top of the highest plants, and, as soon as any one appeared with gun in hand, giving a quick cry of alarm, upon which the whole flock flew away. On this account I was unable to obtain a single specimen of this beautiful bird, which I have not seen in any other part of this country, and which I recognized at once, even at a distance, as new to my collection, from its large red front. At last I found a living specimen in the possession of a shop-keeper, who would not part with it, having reared it from the nest and made a great favourite of it. But I was able to observe more carefully the specific distinctness of this bird than from a distance; and from this examination I made the description published in my 'Reise durch die La Plata-Staaten,' vol. ii. p. 442, as follows:—

Size and colour of *Conurus murinus*; whole plumage bright green, only the forehead at the base of the bill blood-red. Bill, in life, pale rose-colour, or quite white in old individuals. Carpal region green; the wing-feathers blackish, becoming bluer towards the margins. Tail narrow and cuneiform, greenish towards the margins, red at the base and below. Legs light flesh-colour. Iris orange. Whole length 10 inches, wing 5, tail  $4\frac{1}{2}$ .

This short description, the only one I was able to give at the time, was not sufficient to make the species thoroughly known. I therefore wrote to my friends at Tucuman, as soon as I returned to Buenos Aires in the year 1862, to send me specimens of this interesting Parrot; but all my solicitations, though repeated many times, were without effect. I never obtained a single specimen, although the bird is not rare in the vicinity of the large forests on the western sides of the town, near the slopes of the mountains, and sometimes very common.

At last my friend Dr. Bruland, physician at Tucuman, an excellent collector who had forwarded me many interesting objects for my collection, brought me two well-preserved skins; and some months before, Mr. Holmberg, of Buenos Aires, who made a journey to collect zoological objects in the northern provinces, brought home from Salta a skin of the same species, which I was able to compare with the other two now in the Public Museum of Buenos Aires.

These three skins enable me to give the following full description.

Beginning with the size, I find that the living specimen I examined must have been very young, and by no means fully adult, as the three skins now under my inspection are all larger. The two largest measure from the front to the tip of the tail 13 inches, and the smaller specimen (from Salta) 12 inches, tail  $6\frac{1}{2}$  inches, and the wings  $7\frac{1}{2}$ – $7\frac{3}{4}$ .

The predominating colour is pure green, somewhat darker on the upperside, more especially on the head and neck, but clearer on the underside; the wing- and tail-feathers are of the same colour outside, both with black shafts, and the former with a blackish interior margin inclining to blue. The inside of these above-mentioned feathers is yellowish grey, darker on the margins, and the yellow colour clearer on the tail-feathers towards the base, which in some specimens are of an orange appearance.

There is no red on these feathers in any of the three specimens; but it is possible that when alive it may have had this colour, if not very distinct, at least visible. I find in one of these specimens a red spot on two of the tail-coverts, which are generally completely green.

The red colour is regular only on the front of the head, beginning from the base of the upper mandible, extending up to and behind the eye; but a small space of green appears over the middle of the eye, and descends on the cheeks to the ear and the under mandible, with some green feathers near the angle of the mouth.

At first these red feathers are very small and of a dark red-brown, and thence the others become blood-red. Besides this regular frontal patch there are other red feathers on other parts of the body, but without any constant regularity in different specimens of the same species. I find in my three examples great difference in the distribution of these red feathers.

There generally seem to exist some red feathers on the neck, front of the throat, and breast; also there is always a circle of red feathers at the end of the tibia.

As to the habits and manner of living of this bird, I cannot add any thing to what I have already said at the commencement of this communication. It lives only in the northern mountainous districts of the Argentine Republic, never coming to the plains of the Pampas.

I take this occasion to correct some mistakes made by Dr. Finsch in his work, respecting my previous communications on different species of Parrots of this country and of Brazil.

The author says (vol. i. p. 174) that he knows nothing of the spines on the sides of the tongue of the *Aræ*, mentioned by me in my work on the Animals of Brazil. In that work (vol. ii. p. 152) I described the tip of the tongue of this genus as like a stalk in form (*stängel förmig*). But this German word was a mistake of my printers. I wrote "*stämpelförmig*" (shaped like a pestle), comparing the thick fleshy tongue of the *Aræ* (although not entirely

cylindrical) to that instrument, but by no means to that of a stalk of a flower or fruit, to which the tongue has no resemblance.

I have at this very moment under my inspection the tongue of a large *Macrocercus macao* (*Sittace chloroptera*, Gray), which recently died in the house of one of my friends. This tongue has on each side, behind the two fringed lobes, with which the tongue of all parrots terminate, several large spines.

In the tongue of *Bolborhynchus murinus* I find no spines in the same place.

In volume i. of the same work, Dr. Finsch thinks it surprising (*auffallend*) that I have not mentioned that *Conurus nanday* also inhabits the Argentine Republic, although the specimen in Mr. Sclater's collection came from Buenos Aires. This latter fact may be true; but I am still more surprised to find that Dr. Finsch thinks that all specimens coming from Buenos Aires must necessarily have lived in this country. The species alluded to is by no means an inhabitant of the Argentine Republic, but comes only from Paraguay, and is often brought to Buenos Aires alive, as the bird is here considered a great rarity. That it lives also at Bolivia I have never heard here in Buenos Aires, though I have had a living specimen in my room for a long while, which was very tame, and would stand on my shoulder and remain in this position while I took long walks. At last I gave it to a friend of mine who was going to Europe, with the instruction that after its death it was to be put in the collection at Halle.

The description of this bird given by Dr. Finsch is not entirely correct. The head has no blackish brown on the front and vertex, but is entirely black, the brown colour being the consequence of the skin being old and dry.

In vol. ii. part 1, p. 116, of Dr. Finsch's work, the *Bolborhynchus monachus* is named "*calita*." The orthography of this term is erroneous, the bird, which is very common in all parts of the Argentine Republic, being called always *catita*. Again, Dr. Finsch says the two sexes do not differ; but I find the breast of the male of a much clearer grey than that of the female, and that it has very distinct, darker and clearer transverse stripes, while the latter are wanting in the female, which has an obscure grey-coloured breast, with a trace of brown-grey, which is not seen at all in the male.

In the young state both sexes are alike.

In vol. ii. p. 126, Dr. Finsch describes my *Bolborhynchus rubrirostris* from the young specimen sent by myself to the Bremen Museum, and blames me for not mentioning the blue-grey-greenish colour on the throat and breast. But this colour is not persistent, but is only found in the young bird (of the first year). The adult bird is entirely clear green on the breast, the same as on the neck and the whole body. From the young state of the specimen examined by Dr. Finsch results also the discrepancy in the length of the wing, which measures 5 inches in the old bird, and not 3" 10'" as he says.